

NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

Topic: Immunization rates highest ever in Mississippi
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Date: July 26, 1999

Mississippi's 1999 survey of two-year old children shows a best-ever 87.1 percent protected from vaccine-preventable diseases by 27 months of age.

State Health Officer Dr. Ed Thompson announced the achievement, praising both private physicians and public health workers for helping reach that high mark.

"Few states can beat our record," he said.

"Increasing numbers of children now get their shots from private doctors, who are becoming a more important part of the public health system," Thompson said. "Even though most youngsters still get their shots at The Health Department, this good record is a fine indication of the big effort among private physicians."

The 87.1 percent completion of the recommended immunization schedule for two-year-old children increased from 84.2 percent reported in the 1998 survey. Numbers of Mississippi children fully immunized come from actual immunization records; nationally reported immunization compliance numbers are based on parent recall augmented with records.

Among Public Health Districts, Tombigbee District IV boasts the best record – 95.3 percent compliance – with Northeast Public Health District II at 94 percent and Southwest Public Health District VII and Delta Hills Public Health District III following closely at 90.8 and 90.1 percent, respectively (*see accompanying map*).

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Immunization numbers highest ever – add 1

Mississippi aims to fully immunize 90 percent of the state's children by two years of age with the recommended doses of vaccine: four DTP, three Hib, three polio, one MMR, and three Hepatitis B.

“Vaccines are among the safest and most effective measures for the prevention of disease,” the State Health Officer said. “The introduction and widespread use of vaccines has resulted in global eradication of smallpox and dramatic declines in the incidence of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, and polio when compared to disease levels in the pre-vaccine era.”

Aggressive community-based immunization efforts must occur to push Mississippi's compliance to and above the 90 percent goal, Dr. Thompson added. Two strategies will help.

“Nearly all infants begin their immunizations on time but do not complete them on schedule,” he said. “We must focus special emphasis on ensuring the children finish immunizations in their second year of life. We can do this through eliminating missed opportunities to immunize and through an intense focus on the fourth immunization visit.

“We can also identify and follow up on children falling behind in their immunizations,” he added. “Our immunization registry can help us identify and locate children not adequately immunized for their age – with that knowledge, we can find and vaccinate the remaining 12.9 percent of not-fully-protected children by the time they're two.”

Dr. Thompson stressed the importance of parent's attention to immunizing their children on time. “As parents, it's our job to protect our children from diseases no child should suffer,” said Thompson, “Our children can't protect themselves from these diseases - they're depending on us.”